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ABSTRACT

Utilizing questionnaires, this study investigated the possible relationships among sex role ideology, sex role socialization experiences and motivation for parenthood. Subjects included 174 adopting (the traditional homemaker-mother role) and 126 dual-career parents. Adoptive subjects tended to express traditional sex role ideologies, while dual-career subjects expressed a more contemporary outlook. Findings on the values of parenthood revealed a unifying motivational system rather than distinct and independent value categories. Both sex role ideology and career status were meaningfully related to the benefits and costs of having children. Working women and women with more contemporary or egalitarian ideas about appropriate behavior for the sexes tended to focus more on the costs and decision-making anxieties concomitant with having children; whereas women maintaining a more traditional homemaker-mother role or holding more conservative notions about appropriate behaviors for the sexes tended to stress the benefits derived from having children. (Author)

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Sex Role Ideology and Socialization Experiences As They Relate to the Motivation for Parenthood

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Introduction

Utilizing questionnaires, the present study investigated the possible relationships among sex role ideology, sex role socialization experiences and motivation for parenthood. This paper starts with the assumption that socialization experiences influence the development of subsequent sex role beliefs about appropriate behavior for men and women. Parenthood, especially for women, is viewed as part of a career choice. It was predicted that sex role ideology would be related to career choice and the nature of the values concerning parenthood and having children. Career orientations studied in this project included the traditional homemaker-mother role and the dual career role which included both the homemaker-mother role and professional commitments outside the home.

Sex role beliefs were measured by items dealing with attitudes toward educational and career opportunities for women, happiness associated with various role behaviors, and personal-psychological characteristics of women. Values of parenthood were measured by a modified version of an instrument developed by Arnold and Fawcett (1975). Ten areas concerning the values and costs of children were tapped: parenthood as a personal learning experience, the continuity of family traditions, the opportunity and satisfaction of providing nurturance and guidance, acquisition of adult social roles within one's community, happiness and stimulation derived from interactions with

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children, establishing structure and purpose in one's life, parenthood as an instinctive motivation, strengthening of marriage bonds, the financial costs of children, and the necessity of thoughtfully reaching decisions about parenthood. A major preliminary question concerned whether Arnold and Fawcett's value categori s were distinct and independent. Early socialization experiences were examined in regard to relationships with parents and peers.

Predictions

Reflecting their chosen life styles, dual career couples were predicted to have more contemporary or egalitarian beliefs about appropriate behavior for men and women. It was predicted that adopting couples who could not have biological children and yet persisted in pursuing a family life which included children would be more traditional in their beliefs about appro riate behavior for the sexes. These predictions were based on theoretical assumptions in line with an expectancy theory of motivation. Varying expectancies concerning the likeliness of success and the evaluation of those behaviors which lead to success as appropriate are likely to lead to divergent goals. The direction and persistence of career choice behavior for women is thus seen as a function of the beliefs and attitudes concerning feasible and appropriate behaviors for men and women.

Differences in valuing children and parenthood were also expected between adopting and career oriented families. The different values supplied by having children were anticipated to be consistent with expectations based on sex role ideology and the importance of fulfilling the more traditional sex role norms. Again, the direction and persistence of life style choices relates to what one p ives as appropriate and rewarding.

It was conjectured that early sex role socialization experiences which shaped sex role ideology would also b lated to parenthood values. First we looked at subjects' relationships with their own parents. This study predicted that those persons who experienced warmth, nurturance and approval as children would likely seek to recreate these experiences by becoming parents themselves. Distinct from memories of affectionate and supportive parents, it was predicted that the expected happiness and satisfaction of parenthood would be a function of the perceived happiness and satisfaction of one's own mother. Focusing on social success during adolescence, we predicted that those subjects who were successful in their dating and social experiences as adolescents would emphasize those values of parenthood related to social roles and solidifying marital relationships.

Subjects

Three hundred subjects participated in this study, including 174 adopting and 126 dual career parents. Adopting subjects were obtained through 8 child-placing agencies and 1 organization composed of adopting couples. Dual career subjects were matched with adopting subjects on a number of variables, including income, education and age. The majority of all subjects were classified as upper-middle class. The dual career couples were defined as parents who both work. They were contacted by phone, and the study was explained. If they indicated an interest in participating, questionnaires were mailed to them. Adopting ubjects were normally solicited at the convenience of agency personnel and were informed that their cooperation in the study would not reflect on evaluations made by the agency. Both groups of subjects completed the questionnaires in their home and returned them

anonymously by mail. Of the 310 adoptive subjects solicited, 174 returned completed questionnaires, a 56% return rate. Of the 210 dual career subjects solicited 126 returned completed questionnaires, a 60% return rate.

Results

Adoptive subjects tended to express traditional sex role ideologies while dual subjects expressed a more contemporary outlook. This is consistent with predictions. Figure 1 illustrates these findings. There was also a tendency for men to be more traditional than women. Sex and career status in a combined regression explained a significant degree of the variation in sex role ideology ($F(3,296)=13.00$, $p < .0001$). Most of this effect was due to the relationship between sex role ideology and parental status. The main effect for parental or career status was highly significant ($F(1,296)=19.47$, $p < .0001$). This finding lends support to our initial prediction that sex role ideologies are consistently related to career and life style choices. Those women who hold traditional beliefs about appropriate behaviors for women were more likely to be maintaining a life style which excludes professional involvements outside the home. Those who hold more contemporary or egalitarian ideas about appropriate roles for women were less likely to make such an exclusion.

Focusing now upon the values of parenthood, the intercorrelations for the ten values of parenthood revealed a unifying motivational system rather than value categories which were distinct and independent. Table 1 presents these findings. Although a number of the values were positively correlated, this was especially true for six of the values: establishing a purpose in life, assuming an adult social role in the community, strengthening marriage bonds, being aware of the costs of children, having foresight in decision making and the belief that having and wanting children is instinctive.

As table 1 shows sex role ideology was found to be meaningfully correlated with agreement on parenthood values and costs. A contemporary sex role ideology was negatively correlated with strong agreement concerning most of the benefits of children -- traditions, nurturance, social roles, happiness, purpose, instinct, and marriage. High or contemporary scores on the sex role ideology scale were positively and significantly correlated only with agreement on those statements which referred to the costs of children and the necessity of making careful decisions. It should be stressed that this patterning of correlations is derived from the responses of both men and women. To the extent that contemporary views about women were held, a person was less likely to endorse any statement regarding the benefits derived from having children, and in addition, the costs of children and the importance of making careful decisions were found to be more salient.

Career choice or commitment was also found to be related to the perceived values of parenthood. Since these results are correlational in nature, it is difficult to establish with certainty the direction of the influence. With adoptive couples it is apparent that they must have had some prior commitment to the parenthood role or they would have never applied for adoption. A multivariate analysis of variance performed across all value components indicated that adoptive parents gave higher endorsements to benefits derived from parenthood, ($F(10,287)=3.70$, $p < .0001$. The value categories which adoptive subjects endorsed more strongly than dual subjects were: purpose in life ($F(1,296)=18.15$, $p < .0001$), the desire to give nurturance and guidance to children, ($F(1,296)=12.80$, $p < .0004$), marriage bonds, ($F(1,296)=6.12$, $p < .01$), instinctive drives, ($F(1,296)=5.06$, $p < .03$), social roles ($F(1,296)=4.56$, $p < .03$), and happiness ($F(1,296)=4.51$, $p < .03$).

Only with costs of children ($F(1,296)=12.86$, $p < .0004$) and decision-mindedness ($F(1,296)=5.49$, $p < .02$) did dual career subjects give higher endorsements than adoptive subjects. Commitment to the motherhood career by adoptive subjects is further highlighted by the number of children they desire. The mean number of children desired by adoptive women was 2.66 and by dual career women, 2.26, ($F(1,296)=5.30$, $p < .02$). Similar findings were obtained from men.

As noted previously men as a group tended to hold more traditional beliefs about appropriate behaviors for women. They were also found to give stronger endorsements to the benefits derived from having children, as indicated by a multivariate analysis of variance, ($F(10,287)=5.45$, $p < .0001$).

We now turn to the impact of socialization experiences upon the values of having children. It was found that prior socialization experiences were consistently related to logical patternings of subsequent evaluations of the benefits of having children. Table 2 lists the exact correlations. Recollections of parental nurturance and support were positively correlated to the values of nurturance, happiness and marriage. Recollections of success in early dating and social experiences were positively correlated to the value of parenthood as strengthening a marriage and giving purpose to life. Recollections that parents' marriage was successful and their mother was happy in her role as wife and mother were positively correlated with the values of nurturance, purpose in life and marriage bonds.

Focusing on the relationship between career status and prior socialization experiences, adoptive subjects recalled more parental nurturance and support than did dual subjects, ($F(1,296)=3.31$, $p < .07$). Women as a group also reported

more parental nurturance than did men, ($F(1,296)=5.90$, $p < .01$) No group differences were found in adolescent dating and social experiences. Dual career men were less convinced than other subjects that their mothers had been satisfied with their roles as wives and mother, ($F(1,296)=13.59$, $p < .04$).

Discussion

Sex role beliefs appear to be meaningfully related to career choices and parental values. Becoming a parent can be viewed as part of a career choice. Early socialization experiences appear to influence both attitudes and behaviors with respect to career choice and in regard to the values that parenthood affords the individual. The purpose of this study was to explore these relationships, thus furthering our understanding of major social and family roles.

Many groups are interested in why people want to procreate and the impact of having children. Feminists are one such group. Many feminists emphasize the diminished opportunities for independence and self-determination which are concommitant with the motherhood role in our society. The thrust of their movement is on personal freedom and opportunity for women. Women in our society seem to be experiencing a struggle between self-actualization and what we have termed social-actualization. As conceptualized here social actualization is similar to stages three and four in Maslow's hierarchy (1954). A contemporary sex role ideology is more compatible with self-actualization; whereas traditional sex role beliefs focus more on the importance of significant others in a woman's life, such as her husband and children, and thus are more compatible with social-actualization. Our findings support this view. Women who hold traditional beliefs about appropriate behaviors for women were more

likely to be maintaining a life style which excluded career involvements outside the home. Examining the ten values of parenthood we found a unifying system rather than value categories which were distinct and independent. Many of these values revolved around what Maslow termed affiliation needs or needs for self-esteem from others. The social values having children affords could be arranged in a series of concentric spheres with the core sphere centering on the marriage relationship and then the parent-child relationship. Family traditions and social roles represent the outer layers. It is interesting to note that a contemporary or high sex role ideology score was negatively correlated to most of the benefits of children but positively correlated only with statements referring to the costs of children and the necessity of making careful decisions. In addition, career oriented or dual career couples gave significantly lower endorsements to many of the values of parenthood. Their endorsements exceeded adoptive couples only in the costs of children and in the necessity of making careful decisions when children are involved.

The traditional homemaker-wife-mother role is not necessarily antithetical to self-actualizacion, but for those who hold traditional views about appropriate behaviors for women this role may be very conducive to fulfilling affiliative needs. For women with a belief system or life style which is less restrictive in regard personal options, there may be increased opportunities for fulfilling affiliative needs outside the parent-child relationship. It seems apparent that children fulfill parental needs in accord with belief systems and chosen life styles. For dual career mothers combining a career and motherhood is likely to be somewhat of a challenge. For these women motivation for parenthood must indeed be significant. Our findings indicate

more research is needed in this area.

The direction and persistence of career choice behavior for women and the values couples hold concerning parenthood can be seen as a function of the beliefs and attitudes held concerning appropriate behaviors for men and women. Those who find it legitimate and acceptable for women to focus on the self are less likely to be concerned with the belongingness or esteem from children which are by-products of the parenthood role.

References

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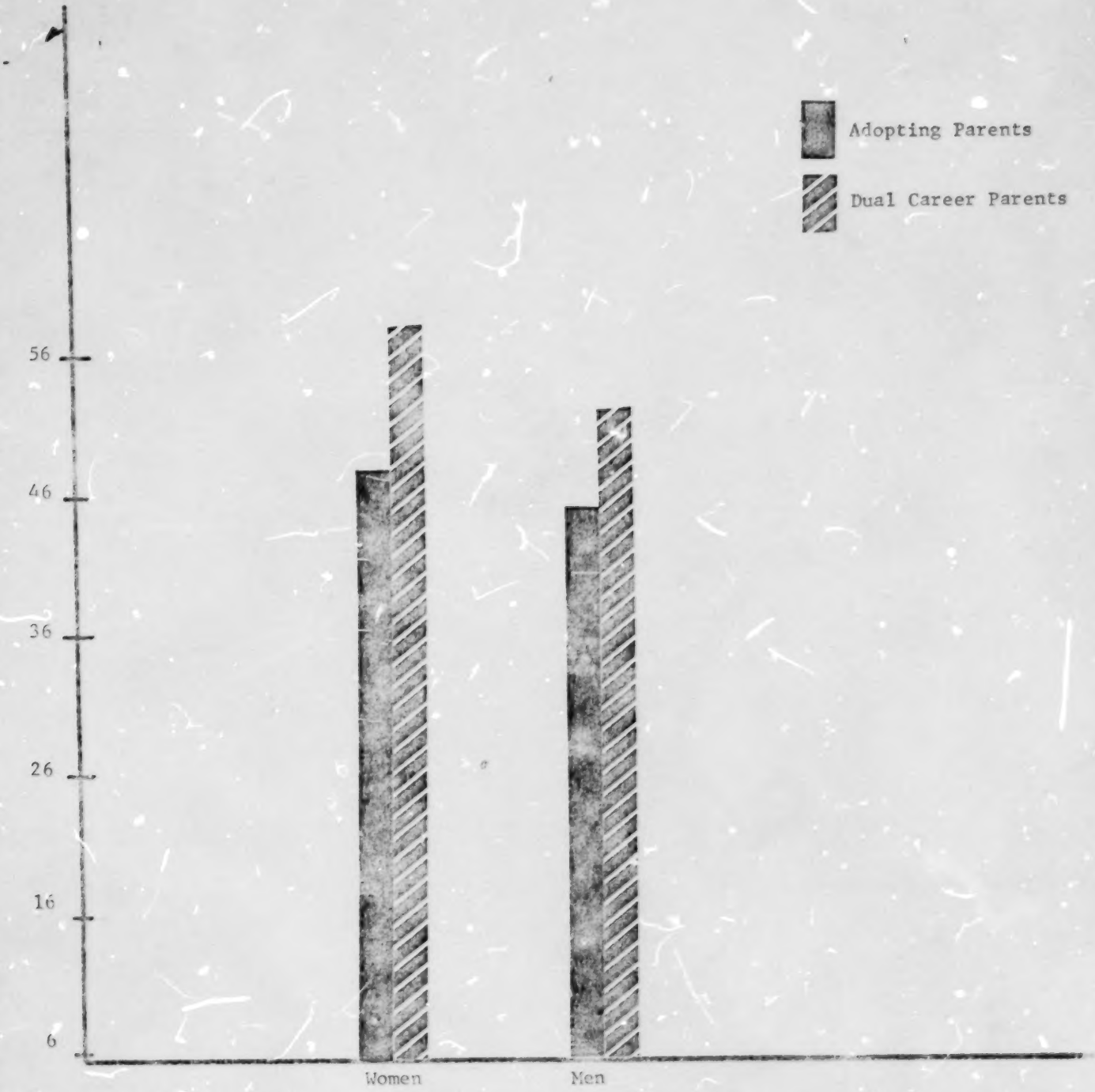

Figure 1: Comparison of Sex Role Ideology Scores
(A high score indicates a contemporary viewpoint)

Table 1

Intercorrelations Among Values of Parenthood

and Sex Role Ideology

	I Per.	II Trad.	III Nurt.	IV Soc.	V Happ.	VI Purpose	VII Instct.	VIII Marr.	IX Costs	X Dec.	XI Ideol.
I Personal Learning		.06	.12*	.02	.08	.08	.01	.12*	.07	.17***	.09
II Tradition, Continuity			.51***	.14**	.30***	.17**	.23***	.15**	.06	.03	-.26***
III. Nurturance & Guidance				.20***	.43***	.26***	.25***	.25***	-.03	-.01	-.39***
IV Social Roles					-.09	.81***	.78***	.81***	.44***	.59***	-.11*
V Happiness, Stimulation						.02	.04	-.02	-.21***	-.28***	-.34***
VI Purpose in Life							.83***	.87***	.32***	.56***	-.21***
VII Instinctive, Biological								.82***	.36***	.52***	-.24***
VIII Marriage Bonds									.39***	.57***	-.15**
IX Costs										.61***	.20***
X Decision Mindedness											.17**
XI Sex Role Ideology											

* p <.05

**p <.01

***p <.001

Table 2

Intercorrelations of Socialization

Experiences with Values of Parenthood

Value of Parenthood	Secondary Reinforcement	Instrumental Conditioning	Observational Learning
I Personal Learning	.03	-.02	.04
II Tradition	.06	-.06	.03
III Nurturance	.13**	-.06	.13**
IV Social Roles	.07	.09	.04
V Happiness	.14**	.08	.09
VI Purpose in Life	.13**	.12*	.14**
VII Instinctive	.07	.05	.05
VIII Marriage	.13**	.12*	.14**
IX Costs	-.12*	-.01	-.01
X Decision-Mindedness	.02	-.02	.02

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$